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Strengthening United Nations action in the field of human rights through the promotion of international cooperation based on the principles of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity

Report of the Secretary-General**

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* A/55/150.

** In accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/248, sect. C, para. 1, this report is being submitted on 24 July 2000 so as to include as much updated information as possible.

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I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 54/174 of 17 December 1999, requested the Secretary-General to ask Member States to present practical proposals and ideas that should contribute to the strengthening of United Nations action in the field of human rights, through the promotion of international cooperation based on the principles of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity; and to submit a comprehensive report on the question at its fifty-fifth session.

2. Pursuant to the above request, a note verbale was sent to States Members of the United Nations requesting their views on the subject. As at 20 July 2000, replies had been received from three Member States: Belarus, Costa Rica and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. The present report has been prepared on the basis of the replies received. Any further replies received will be reflected in an addendum to this report. It will be recalled that two previous reports prepared on this question were published in 1993 and 1999 (documents E/CN.4/1993/30 and A/54/216 respectively).

II. Replies received from Member States

3. The reply of **Belarus** read as follows:

"The Republic of Belarus has consistently supported the efforts of the United Nations to develop regional and universal cooperation in the field of human rights and welcomes the steps taken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide advisory assistance to Member States of the Organization in developing national plans for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Belarus makes active use of the experience of Member States of the United Nations, as compiled by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in order to develop and implement national programmes for the further improvement of the observance of human rights.

In our country we have adopted and are implementing a national plan for the development of education in the field of human rights up to 2004, and programmes such as 'Children of Belarus', 'Women of Belarus', 'Basic Trends in State Family Policy' and so forth.

Work is currently in progress on an integrated national programme of action for the protection of the rights and freedoms of citizens in the process of establishing a civil society in the Republic of Belarus. Thus, on the basis of the experience of special programmes targeting particular population groups, a qualitative transfer to the national level is taking place.

The experience of Belarus demonstrates that one of the keys to achieving the maximum positive impact from the implementation of national plans and programmes in the field of human rights is to clearly define objectives and specific time-frames for attaining them. A focus on results, rather than on the fact that particular measures are being taken, is an essential precondition for public confidence in the intentions of the State once it has adopted a national programme of action in the field of human rights.

In that connection, the advisory assistance of the specialized institutions of the United Nations system is clearly essential for the development of criteria and methods for verifying the results of the implementation of such national programmes.

There is also an urgent need to enhance the role of the United Nations as a forum in which the Member States of the Organization can exchange experience in the development and implementation of national programmes in the field of human rights. The adverse consequences of the impact of the process of globalization on human rights must be offset by purposeful regional and universal cooperation to promote and defend human rights; that might, in particular, be achieved through coordination and joint implementation by interested States, at the regional level, of national plans in the field of human rights."

4. **Costa Rica** in its reply provided information on the work of the International Cooperation Division within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the objectives of the work of that Division and on particular projects funded through international

cooperation. The objectives of the International Cooperation Division included: following up on cooperation policies forming part of the foreign policy of the Government of Costa Rica; consolidating the technical and administrative structures for negotiating all activities concerned with technical cooperation; strengthening action between developing countries with respect to technical cooperation; coordinating the regional mechanism for Central American technical cooperation; controlling and evaluating the technical cooperation projects executed in Costa Rica; disseminating information in Costa Rica and, for donors, the work carried out in the field of international cooperation; and analysing, evaluating and overseeing the scholarship programmes for Costa Ricans studying abroad. Details were provided regarding those technical cooperation projects either to be completed, currently being executed or finalized within Costa Rica since 1998, together with information on sponsoring, financing and the ministry responsible for the projects. This covered the areas of gender and the situation of women; administration of justice; electoral assistance; childhood and youth; humanitarian assistance; disabled persons; employment; indigenous people; and migrants affected by hurricane Mitch.

5. The reply of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya read as follows:

> "The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya firmly believes in the importance of maintaining impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity in the international community's consideration of the question of human rights and of dealing effectively with human rights violations, with a view to ensuring that this issue retains a purely humanitarian character, promotes human relations and enhances the social standards of all peoples and is not used or exploited as a pretext for the attainment of political ends, the exertion of pressure on any State or intervention in its internal affairs. It therefore supported General Assembly resolution 54/147, which reaffirms the importance of ensuring the universality, objectivity and non-selectivity of treatment of this humanitarian issue and prevention of its exploitation in the service of the political interests of specific States.
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> Although the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and numerous other United Nations decisions emphasize that States should be guided by these principles in the active consideration of the promotion and safeguarding of human rights, treatment of this issue at the international level does not extend beyond the use of human rights by certain Western States as a pretext for imposing political or economic pressures on specific States in the South. Thus, we see them subordinating them to their own interests and raising the slogan of human rights whenever they feel that they risk losing hope of achieving these interests. They are not concerned about human rights violations, however grave, and the Middle East and some other regions of the world are viewed as clear exemplars for the application of double standards in dealing with such issues. This is confirmation that the international community has been unable to attain the goal to which it aspires, namely the actual safeguarding and protection of human rights through cooperation, constructive dialogue and mutual assistance between States and the rejection of modes of conduct based on confrontation, condemnation, coercion and interference in the internal affairs of States."